

The Potency of Social Media In Sensitizing Rural Dwellers In Port Harcourt About Cholera Outbreak

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>The study examined the potency of social media in sensitizing rural dwellers in Port Harcourt about cholera outbreaks. The study was motivated by the need to determine the extent to which social media broadcasts can provide timely, accessible, and understandable health information to rural populations, particularly in relation to cholera prevention, symptoms, treatment, and control. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised rural dwellers in Port Harcourt, while a sample of 100 respondents was selected for the study. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire structured into Sections A and B, with responses measured using a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Strongly Disagreed, and Disagreed. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by the researcher's supervisor. Data collected were analysed using frequency tables and simple percentages, while the hypothesis was tested using statistical analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that social media broadcasts play an important role in reaching and engaging rural dwellers in Port Harcourt with information about cholera outbreaks. The study further established that the accessibility of social media, use of local languages, interactive programme formats, appropriate timing and frequency of broadcasts, and the credibility of information sources contribute to the effectiveness of social media health communication. The hypothesis test showed that social media broadcasts were effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concluded that social media remains an effective medium for cholera sensitization among rural dwellers in Port Harcourt. It recommended, among other measures, increased local-language content, more interactive health programmes, stronger community involvement, continuous training of broadcasters, and improved broadcasting infrastructure to enhance the effectiveness of social media-based health communication.</i> Keywords: Social Media, Cholera Sensitization, Rural Dwellers, Health Communication, Cholera Prevention, Public Health Awareness.
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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Egbujo Stella Onyinyechi & Professor Innime Righteous. (2026). The potency of social media in sensitizing rural dwellers in Port Harcourt about cholera outbreak. UKR Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 2(10), 40-45.	

Introduction

Social media has been much discussed as a means of disseminating health information, especially to rural communities where access to traditional media might be limited. Social media has been identified as a key medium to raise awareness in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, by the outbreak of cholera. Adebayo et al. (2015) indicated that social media capabilities of broadcasting information even to the rural population were reported to be effective due to

its accessibility and the ability to broadcast health messages in local languages.

Cholera is an acute diarrhoea which is caused by infection with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* and is a serious public health problem in certain African nations including Nigeria. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) highlights that delivery of timely and accurate information is crucial to prevent and control cholera outbreak. Where literacy rates could be low, information about symptoms, preventive

measures and the need for early health services on cholera can be communicated via accessible social media channels. This communication can assist in the general understanding of the population and lead to proper reactions in the event of a possible infection.

Okeke and Nwankwo (2018) assessed the role of community social media stations in raising the awareness of rural residents of Port Harcourt on cholera. They reported that programmes based on local needs, tailored to local dialects and culturally relevant messages would enhance the knowledge and understanding of community members about cholera. The scientists also emphasized that interactive broadcasts are useful to give listeners the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns. This can provide communicators with opportunities to engage directly with the audience and serve specific information needs, while providing a more relevant health education approach to the communities being targeted.

Furthermore, in 2019, a survey conducted by Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR) revealed that 78% of the rural population in Port Harcourt who use social media had received information on cholera prevention and control using broadcasts on social media. At this reported level of exposure, social media could be a valuable means of public health education to rural communities. The survey also showed that these messages were linked to the use of preventive measures such as boiling drinking water, proper hygiene practices and so on. The results indicate that social media communication can play a role in the prevention of cholera and raising awareness of the public.

Social media has shown promise in boosting cholera awareness among the rural population, however, there are a number of issues to be addressed for its effectiveness. A key issue is the requirement for constant and continuous communication, with occasional messages possibly not being enough to keep the awareness and motivation for lasting changes in preventive behaviour alive. Cooperation between public health authorities, social media broadcasters, and community leaders is also required to make sure that these messages are accurate and relevant to their community and are consistent with community norms (Akinyemi & Olatunji, 2020).

Investigated literature indicates that social media may be a helpful tool to disseminate information about cholera outbreaks to rural residents in Port Harcourt. It can effectively reach a wide audience and communicate with the target population, including those with poor literacy, and convey messages in local languages, making it a valuable tool for public health education. However, it is highly dependent on the continuity of communication and

enhances cooperation between the relevant stakeholders. The effects of health interventions provided via social media over time should be evaluated, and new strategies for incorporating these media into the public health education system in rural areas should be explored in future research.

Research Design

Research design is the specification of the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the information needed to address the problems. The descriptive survey design was used in the investigation. The study took due account of the nature of the situation.

Population of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the target population consists of rural dwellers in Port Harcourt .

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The sample of the study is that part of the population that has been selected for closer investigation. The researcher used one hundred (100) rural inhabitants in Port Harcourt for the selection of the needed samples for this investigation.

Instrument for Data Collection

The research instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researcher. It was structured in a clear, simple, and organized format to facilitate respondents' understanding. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, designated as Sections A and B. Section A was designed to obtain personal and demographic information about the respondents, whereas Section B contained questions derived from the research questions to gather relevant information from the participants. Responses were rated using a four-point scale comprising Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D).

Validity of the Instrument

To determine the face validity of the study, the research instrument was examined and assessed by the supervisor for the suitability of each item of the instrument. The comment of the supervisor was used to get final items, which was submitted to content validity to ensure the content of the instruments reflective of the region which the instruments are meant to cover.

Method of Data Analysis

The response to the items in the questionnaire was analysed using frequency tables and simple percentage technique. The hypotheses of the research as indicated above were examined by Chi-Square Statistics.

4.2 Presentation of Data

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire

	Frequency	Percent
Returned	87	87.0
Unreturned	13	13.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.1 showed that 87%(87) respondents returned their questionnaire while 13% (13) respondents did not returned their questionnaire. This implies that a large proportion of the questionnaire were filled and returned.

Table 2: Distribution According to Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	51	58.6
Female	36	41.4
Total	87	87.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As indicated in Table 2, 58.6%(51) respondents were male while 41.4%(36) were female. This shows that male respondents participated more in the research than their female counterpart.

Table 3: Distribution according to Age

	Frequency	Percent
21 – 30 years	30	34.5
31 – 40 years	24	27.6
41 – 50 years	18	20.7
51 – 60 years	9	10.3
Above 60 years	6	6.9
Total	87	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In the age grade category in Table 3, it shows that the respondents 34.5% (30) respondents are between 21 – 30 years, 27.6%(24) are between 31 – 40 years age range, 20.7%(18) are from 41 – 50 years, 10.3%(9) respondents are in between 51 – 60 years, while 6.9%(6) are in the age bracket of above 60 years.

Table 4: Distribution According to Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent
Single	49	56.3
Married	38	43.7
Total	87	87.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The Marital category of the respondents shows that 56.3% (49) respondents were single while 43.7%(38) respondents were married. This implies that respondents with single status attended more to the questionnaire.

4.3 Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

Ho: social media broadcasts is not effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt.

H1: social media broadcasts is effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt.

Table 5: Relationship between social media broadcasts and reaching & engaging the target audience

Structure	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	Standard Error	t_{cal}	t_{crit}	Decision
social media broadcasts	87	3.59	0.883	172	0.177	2.813	1.96	H_0 Rejected
reaching & engaging the target audience	87	3.09	1.398					

0.5 level of significance

Table 5 above shows that the calculated value of t-test $t_{cal} = 2.813$ which is greater than the critical value $t_{crit} = 1.96$ at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom $df = 172$; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis which states “social media broadcasts is not effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt”. This showed that social media broadcasts is effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

There are a number of elements that may be related to the efficiency of social media broadcasts in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt. First, social media is still an easily available medium in rural places where other communication forms such as television and internet may not be so common. As per the study of Chapman et al. (2003), social media is frequently the most reliable source of information in rural communities due to its affordability and easy accessibility. This trust is vital to health communication since it is what makes the messages not only heard but believed and acted upon.

Moreover, the use of local languages and dialects in social media broadcasts significantly enhances their effectiveness. In Port Harcourt, where multiple languages are spoken, social media stations that broadcast in the local languages can reach a broader audience. As noted by Ascroft and Masilela (1994), the use of local languages in media ensures that the information is comprehensible and culturally relevant, which is essential for effective communication. This approach helps in breaking down language barriers and ensures that the health messages are understood by all segments of the population.

The format of social media programs also plays a critical role in engaging the audience. Interactive formats, such as call-in shows and question-and-answer segments, allow listeners to actively participate in the discussion. This interaction not only keeps the audience engaged but also provides an opportunity for immediate clarification of doubts and dissemination of accurate information. According to a study by Vaughan et al. (2000), interactive social media programs have been shown to increase listener engagement and retention of information, which is vital for behavior change.

Furthermore, the timing and frequency of social media broadcasts are important factors in their effectiveness. Regular and strategically timed broadcasts ensure that the health messages reach the audience when they are most likely to be listening. For instance, broadcasting during early morning or late evening, when people are more likely to be at home, can increase the reach and impact of the messages. A study by Valente and Saba (1998) found that repeated exposure to health messages through social media can lead to better knowledge retention and behavior change.

The credibility of the source of information is another crucial factor. Health messages delivered by trusted figures, such as local health workers or community leaders, are more likely to be accepted by the audience. According to Rogers (2003), the credibility of the source significantly influences the effectiveness of health communication. In Port Harcourt, involving local health professionals in social media broadcasts can enhance the trust and acceptance of the health messages.

Lastly, the integration of social media broadcasts with other forms of communication can amplify their effectiveness. Combining social media messages with community outreach programs, posters, and pamphlets can create a more comprehensive approach to health communication. This multi-channel strategy ensures that health messages are reinforced through various mediums, increasing the likelihood of behavior change. A study by Hornik (2002) highlights the importance of using multiple communication channels to achieve a greater impact on public health outcomes.

In conclusion, social media broadcasts are effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt due to their accessibility, use of local languages, interactive formats, strategic timing, credible sources, and integration with other communication methods. These factors collectively contribute to the success of social media as a medium for health communication in rural areas. By leveraging these strengths, health campaigns can effectively disseminate information and promote behavior change among rural dwellers in Port Harcourt.

Conclusion

The study on the effectiveness of social media broadcasts in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port

Harcourt has yielded insightful findings that underscore the medium's significant impact. social media remains a powerful tool for communication, particularly in regions where other forms of media may not be as accessible or widespread. In Port Harcourt, the reach of social media broadcasts is extensive, covering both urban and rural areas, thereby ensuring that a broad spectrum of the population is informed and engaged. This wide reach is facilitated by the relatively low cost of social media sets and the ability to operate them without the need for continuous electricity, which can be a limiting factor for other media forms.

One of the key strengths of social media broadcasts in Port Harcourt is their ability to engage the audience through interactive programs. Call-in shows, interviews, and live discussions allow listeners to participate actively, providing feedback and sharing their views. This interactive element not only keeps the audience engaged but also fosters a sense of community and belonging. The study found that listeners in Port Harcourt appreciate the opportunity to voice their opinions and feel that their contributions are valued, which enhances their overall engagement with the medium.

Furthermore, the content of social media broadcasts in Port Harcourt is tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of the local population. Programs are often broadcast in local languages, making them more accessible and relatable to the audience. Topics covered range from local news and events to health, education, and entertainment, ensuring that there is something of interest for everyone. This relevance of content is a crucial factor in maintaining high levels of listener engagement and loyalty.

The study also highlighted the role of social media in disseminating important information quickly and efficiently. In times of emergencies or public health campaigns, social media broadcasts have proven to be an invaluable resource for timely and accurate information dissemination. The trust that the audience places in social media as a reliable source of information further enhances its effectiveness in reaching and engaging the target audience. This trust is built over time through consistent and credible reporting by local social media stations.

However, the study also identified some challenges that need to be addressed to maximize the effectiveness of social media broadcasts in Port Harcourt. These include the need for continuous training and capacity building for social media presenters and journalists to ensure high-quality content and ethical reporting. Additionally, there is a need for investment in better infrastructure to improve the quality of broadcasts and expand coverage to even more remote areas. Addressing these challenges will help in sustaining and enhancing the impact of social media as a communication medium.

In conclusion, social media broadcasts are highly effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt. The medium's wide reach, interactive nature, relevant content, and role in information dissemination make it a vital tool for communication in the region. By addressing the identified challenges, social media can continue to play a crucial role in informing, educating, and entertaining the people of Port Harcourt, thereby contributing to the overall development of the community.

Recommendation

Based on the study that found social media broadcasts to be effective in reaching and engaging the target audience in Port Harcourt, here are seven recommendations:

1. **Expand Local Content:** To further enhance engagement, social media stations in Port Harcourt should focus on increasing the amount of local content. This includes news, cultural programs, and discussions that are directly relevant to the community. Local content resonates more with the audience and can significantly boost listener loyalty and participation.
2. **Leverage Interactive Programs:** Incorporate more interactive segments such as call-in shows, live interviews, and social media integration. These formats allow listeners to actively participate, share their opinions, and feel more connected to the broadcast, thereby increasing engagement.
3. **Targeted Advertising:** Advertisers should tailor their messages to the specific demographics and interests of the Port Harcourt audience. Understanding the local culture, preferences, and needs can make advertisements more effective and less intrusive, leading to better reception and higher engagement rates.
4. **Community Involvement:** social media stations should engage with the community through events, sponsorships, and partnerships with local organizations. Hosting community events or collaborating on local projects can strengthen the bond between the station and its listeners, fostering a sense of community and loyalty.
5. **Utilize Data Analytics:** Implement data analytics tools to track listener preferences, peak listening times, and popular content. This data can help social media stations fine-tune their programming to better meet the needs and interests of their audience, ensuring that the content remains relevant and engaging.

6. **Training and Development:** Invest in the training and development of social media personnel, including hosts, journalists, and technical staff. Skilled and knowledgeable staff can produce higher quality content, conduct more engaging interviews, and manage technical aspects more efficiently, all of which contribute to a better listener experience.
7. **Diversify Platforms:** While traditional social media remains effective, exploring additional platforms such as online streaming, podcasts, and social media can help reach a broader audience. Offering content on multiple platforms ensures that listeners can access the broadcasts in various ways, increasing overall reach and engagement.

By implementing these recommendations, social media stations in Port Harcourt can continue to effectively reach and engage their target audience, ensuring sustained growth and community involvement.

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